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INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Ghana deal

Recent arrests by U.S. Customs agents in Newark, N.J., of three Ghanaian exiles on charges of conspiring to purchase weapons to arm 100 men for a coup against the regime of Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings are viewed by some West African diplomats at the United Nations as part of a supposed "U.S. deal to get its CIA spies back from Rawlings."

Joseph Mensah, 67, of London; John Boateng, 44, of Brooklyn, N.Y.; and Kwasi John Baidoo, 40, of Dover, N.J. — all associated with the Ghana Democratic Movement — were seeking to purchase \$250,000 worth of military uniforms and weapons, including grenade launchers and infantry small arms.

The African diplomats pointed out that as a result of the arrests of CIA operations support assistant Sharon Scranage and her lover, Ghanaian businessman Michael Agboutei Soussoudis, 39, a cousin of Mr. Rawlings who was closely linked with the Ghanaian intelligence service, more than a dozen Ghanaians were arrested as CIA "assets." Not all the alleged CIA assets were swapped for Soussoudis last month. In the eyes of African diplomats at the United Nations, the fact that the arrests of the exiles came only a few days after the swap was "evidence" that the United States had agreed to mop up the exile movement, possibly as a favor to the Rawlings regime for having released some of the Ghanaian CIA assets or to gain the release of those remaining in his hands.

Scranage was sentenced to a five-year prison term late in November. Soussoudis, who had been lured to the United States and arrested in July, was given a 20-year suspended prison term and deported. In exchange, eight Ghanaians described in Washington as "friendly to the interests of the United States" were sent to the United States. Six other Ghanaians whom the United States originally sought to release were not covered in the exchange and remained in prison.

Intelligence sources in London and Paris unanimously regard the Scranage affair as a devastating setback to U.S. intelligence operations in West Africa. Ghana's espionage service, headed by Capt. Kojo Tsikata, a virulently anti-American pro-Marxist, was established with the assistance of the Libyan government and its East German advisers.

According to West African sources, the cost of the Scranage romance in human lives alone was considerable. In Burkina Faso (once Upper Volta), six of the military charged with attempting to overthrow the regime of President Thomas Sankara were executed in June 1984. Didier Tiederebeogo, a Burkinabe civilian, was executed for providing the United States with intelligence on the Sankara regime. Buana Kabue, a close adviser to Mr. Sankara, was alleged to have had a longtime relationship with the CIA. He has disappeared.

Similar disclosures containing allegations of CIA activity are said to have been made by Scranage about Benin, Lome, Togo and, of course, Ghana itself, where disappearances and at least four espionage trials have resulted.

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Detente with pope?

Diplomatic leaks that Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev is to visit Italy, probably in March 1986, have given rise to informed speculation that the Soviets also intend to establish a detente with Pope John Paul II. An Italian intelligence source familiar with Soviet deception and "disinformation" operations said that the Soviet Politburo probably would be satisfied just to have photographs of Mr. Gorbachev and the pope meeting on friendly terms flashed across the world by Western news media to undermine Roman Catholic anti-communism. "A picture is worth a thousand words in these matters," the source commented, warning that public opinion is in danger of becoming "intoxicated" with the false image that Mr. Gorbachev is a "moderate, Westernized corporate manager."